

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TRIPOLI 1231

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CVIS, CPAS, LY

SUBJECT: US PASSPORTS AND POLICY RE LIBYA

REF: STATE 187972

1. FOR MANAGEMENT REASONS, HAVE TRIED IN HALF A DOZEN WAYS TO GET AN ACCURATE READING ON WHETHER THE CONTINUANCE OF THIS POST WAS STILL A U.S. OBJECTIVE AND IF SO HOW MUCH WE WILLING TO PAY FOR IT. FOR YEARS THE POST HAD LISTED ITS OWN CONTINUATION AS AN EFFECTIVE MISSION AS THE TOP USG OBJECTIVE IN LIBYA, AND THIS HAD MET WITH NO OBJECTION FROM DEPT. ON OTHER HAND IT OBVIOUS THAT, AS POST SQUEEZED DOWN BY A HOST GOVT THAT INCREASINGLY HOSTILE IN OVERT WAYS, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS MISSION WAS BECOMING INCREASINGLY MOOT. IN WAKE OF KHARTOUM, DEPT ITSELF INDICATED INFORMALLY THAT RATIONALE FOR CLOSING THE POST ALMOST COMPELLING--BUT NOT QUITE. SINCE THEN WE HAVE LOST TWO KEY OFFICERS, RESTRICTIONS ON NORMAL LIFE AND OPERATIONS ARE EVEN TIGHTER, AND THE CASE FOR CLOSING OUT IS STRONGER THAN EVER. HOWEVER, REFTEL STATES DEPT WISHES TO MAINTAIN POST IN ORDER TO PRESERVE ESSENTIAL REPORTING AND CONSULAR AND PROTECTION SERVICES--AND FOR THIS IS WILLING TO PAY A PRICE IN TERMS OF OUR PASSPORT POLICIES. THIS IS A POLITICAL PRICE, BECAUSE THE LARG MADE ARABIC-IN-PASSPORTS A POLITICAL ISSUE AND WE ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGE BY NOT ACQUIESCING.

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2. SO FAR AS I A M AWARE, THERE IS NO OBJECTIVE REASON FOR US TO HAND THE LARG A POLITICAL TRIUMPH AT THIS TIME. ALTOGETHER TO THE CONTRARY. THE ONLY REASON TO ACQUIESCE IS TO KEEP THIS MISSION AFLOAT.

FOR HOW MUCH LONGER? IF FOR A PERIOD OF SIX TO EIGHT MONTHS, ACQUESCENCE IS NOT NECESSARY; WE CAN MANAGE SOMEHOW IF THE OBJECTIVE IS CLEAR AND THE END IS IN SIGHT FOR EACH OF US HERE. IF, HOWEVER, THE IDEA IS TO KEEP THE POST OPEN INDEFINITELY, ACQUESCENCE MAKES MORE SENSE, ON THE GROUND THAT NATIONAL INTERESTS OCCASIONALLY DICTATE LOSS OF FACE. WOULD UNDERLINE THAT THIS IS INVOLVED, NOT ONLY IN ACCEPTING ARABIC IN OUR PASSPORTS, BUT ALMOST EVERYWHERE WE TURN HERE-- USG PROPERTY IN TRIPOLI, U.S. PRIVATE INTERESTS NATIONALIZED WITHOUT COMPENSATION, AND THE WELFARE AND PROTECTION OF REMAINING AMERICANS. FRANKLY OUR FUNCTIONS IN THESE AREAS ARE LARGELY INEFFECTIVE AND MOSTLY SYMBOLIC, AND WILL REMAIN SO FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE UNLESS THIS POST IS BEEFED UP AND THE LARG EVENTUALLY MODERATES ITS HOSTILITY TO THE USG. THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO BELIEVE THE LATTER WILL HAPPEN; RATHER WE ARE THE VICTIMS OF SALAMI TACTICS, AIMED PRECISELY AT KEEPING US PREOCCUPIED BY DEFENSIVE MEASURES, HENCE INOFFENSIVE AND INEFFECTIVE. WHY, AND HOW LONG, SHOULD WE BE WILLING TO ACCEPT THIS HUMILIATING POSITION FOR THE SAKE OF OTHER NATIONAL INTERESTS? AMERICAN OIL INTERESTS IN LIBYA? THEIR DAYS ARE NUMBERED, WHETHER OR NOT WE MAINTAIN THE POST.

3. RIASE THESE QUESTIONS NOT BECAUSE I PRESUME TO HAVE THE AUTHORITATIVE ANSWERS BUT BECAUSE THIS IS THE TIME TO ASK SUCH QUESTIONS AGAIN. WE ARE AT A WATERSHED IN TRIPOLI. IF THE DECISION IS TO KEEP THE POST OPEN TEMPORARILY, THEN AT LEAST WE SHOULD FIX SOME DATES IN ORDER TO MAKE PLANS AND ADJUSTMENTS. IF THE DECISION IS TO TRY TO KEEP THE POST OPEN INDEFINITELY, AND HOPEFULLY MORE EFFECTIVELY, THEN WE MUST NOT ONLY ACCEPT ARABIC IN CONFIDENTIAL

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PASSPORTS BUT MOVE FAST ON NEW PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS, INCLUDING ADDITIONS TO THE STAFF. HAS THE DEPT ADDRESSED THE FULL RANGE OF CONSEQUENCES TO ITS WISH TO KEEP THE POST OPEN?

4. WOULD APPRECIATE A RESPONSE TO THE ABOVE BEFORE GOING INTO DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS ON OTHER MATTERS RAISED REFTEL.
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